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AUTHOR Haignere, Clara S.
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ABSTRACT

Planned Parenthood conducted a national public opinion poll, asking 1,000 12- through 17-year-olds about their knowledge and beliefs on the problem of teenage pregnancy. The results showed that over 50% of the adolescents had sexual intercourse before their 18th birthday. Those teenagers most likely to be sexually active fell into certain at-risk groups with the common denominator being limited life opportunities for further education and career development. Reasons respondents gave for being sexually active included social pressure, followed by curiosity and sexual gratification. However, the most common reason given was that the respondent was "swept away." The majority reported not using contraceptives because they did not know enough about them or even where to get them. Forty percent of the adolescents had no sexuality education in school; only 35 percent had comprehensive sexuality education. Parents have been cited as the primary source of information, yet many respondents reported never having discussed sexuality with their parents. Respondents reported believing that television gave realistic views of sexually trasmitted diseases, pregnancy, the consequences of sex, and family planning. This opinion appeared to change, however, as sexuality education became more comprehensive. Adolescents needing the most education included those doing poorly in school, those in vocational tracks in schools, boys, those from low and middle income families, younger teenagers, and teenagers living in the south. (Author/NB)

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PLANNED PARENTHOOD HARRIS POLL FINDINGS: TEENS' SEXUALITY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS

Clara S. Haignere

CG 020169

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Paper presented at the Annual Children's Defense Fund National Conference, Washington, DC, March 11-13, 1987.

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ABSTRACT OF CDF PRESENTATION
RESULTS OF PP POLL CONDUCTED BY LOUIS HARRIS AND ASSOC.

The poll of 1,000 12-17 year old teenagers on their knowledge and beliefs about sexuality showed that well over 50% of all teenagers have sexual intercourse before their 18th birthday. Teens most likely to be sexually active fall into certain at-risk groups with the common denominator being limited life opportunities for further education and career development. Reasons teens give for being sexually active included social pressure, followed by curiosity and sexual gratification. However, the most common reason (65%) given was that they were "swept away". The majority do not use contraceptives, because they don't know enough about them or even where to get them. Results of the Poll indicate that teens still harbor certain myths and misconceptions, making clear the need for comprehensive sexuality education. Forty percent of teenagers have had NO sexuality education in school, and ONLY 35% have had comprehensive sexuality education. Parents have been reported to be the primary source of information for teens, and yet a significant percentage of teenagers never discuss sexuality with their parents. Teens are influenced by the media, in particular television. Far more often than adults, teenagers believe that television gives realistic views of STD's, pregnancy, the consequences of sex, and family planning. This opinion changes, however, as their sexuality education becomes more comprehensive. Teens needing the most education include those doing poorly in school, those in vocational tracks in schools, boys, those from low and middle income families, younger teens, and teens in the south.

PRESENTATION BY

CLARA HAIGNERE, DIRECTOR OF TEEN ADVOCACY, PLANNED PARENTHOOD

PLANNED PARENTHOOD HARRIS POLL FINDINGS:

TEENS' SEXUALITY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS

AT

CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND CONFERENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C.

MARCH 12, 1987

CB 020169

Good Evening. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to present the results of the second annual Planned Parenthood Poll, conducted for us by Louis Harris and Associates. We are particularly grateful to the three sources of funding for this poll--the Carnegie Corporation, the W. T. Grant Foundation and the Ruth Mott Foundation.

The title of this session is Overcoming Barriers to Teens. That is a tall order. Because to be able to do that, we have to communicate with teenagers. And any of you who have teenagers in your families know how difficult that can be at times. According to researchers in the field, the average teen spends only about 40 minutes a day with their

parents. However, Planned Parenthood for the first time in a national public opinion poll asked teens themselves about their knowledge and beliefs on the problem of teen pregnancy.

In September and October of last year a nationwide cross-section of teenagers --boys and girls, aged 12 to 17 -- were asked a range of questions related to sexual behavior and contraception. The purpose of the survey was to find out as much as possible about the causes of the exceptionally high levels of teenage pregnancy and to identify steps that might be taken to reduce unwanted teen pregnancy.

FINDINGS

I would like to present these findings by asking a series of questions: First

I. TO WHAT EXTENT ARE TEENS HAVING SEXUAL INTERCOURSE?

A. In our poll, three out of ten teens say they have had sexual intercourse. Well over 50% of all teens have had sexual intercourse before they reach their 18th birthday. This figure concurs with figures from a 1981 Alan Guttmacher Institute study in which 58% of girls and 67% of boys had had sexual intercourse by age 18.

II. WHICH TEENS HAVE HAD INTERCOURSE?

Demographically, let me say, it is always difficult to separate out the effects of poverty, poor grades and racial or ethnic differences. The analyses we've done so far do not allow us to understand the complex relationship between these three. But what we see is that:

1. Teens with poor grades are more likely to have had sexual intercourse: See Graph 1.

37% of teens with GPAs of C - F have had sexual intercourse.
25% of teens with GPAs of B - B- have had sexual intercourse.
Only 21% of teens with GPAs of A - B+ have had sexual intercourse.

2. A greater percentage of black teens have had sexual intercourse than white or Hispanic teens. See Graph 2.

47% of Blacks had had sexual intercourse.
27% of Hispanic had had sexual intercourse.
24% of Whites had had sexual intercourse.

3. Those in vocational tracks in school are slightly more likely to have had sexual intercourse. See Graph 3.

34% of vocational tracked teens as versus 27% of academic tracked teens are sexually active.

4. Those who do not plan on going to college are more likely to have had intercourse. See Graph 4.

37% of those NOT planning college as versus 25% of those planning college have been sexually active.

5. Teens from low and middle income families are slightly more likely than teens from high income families to have had intercourse. See Graph 5.

30% of teens from low-income families are sexually active.

29% of teens from middle-income families are sexually active.

22% of teens from high-income families are sexually active.

6. The Eastern and Southern parts of the U.S. have the highest percentage of sexually active teens (35%, 29% respectively) and the Mid-west and West had the lowest (22%, 27%, respectively) See Graph 6.

There were no differences in the percentage of teens who had had intercourse based on extra-curricular activities or sports involvement.

These factors speak to the need to address the life-options of teenagers. The majority of the teens we polled who have had intercourse did not have low-self esteem or low expectations for the future. 92% expect to finish high school and 90% believe one can start out poor and become rich. But those teens with the fewest actual life opportunities for further education and career development, are more likely to have sexual intercourse as a teenager.

III. WHAT ARE THE REASONS TEENS GIVE FOR HAVING SEXUAL INTERCOURSE?

A. Close to 2/3 of the reasons given by all teens (not just those who are sexually active) for having sexual intercourse can best be categorized as social pressure. (See Figure 1.)

1. Peer pressure

2. Everyone's doing it

B. The other most common reasons were curiosity, and sexual gratification.

1. HOWEVER, 77% of sexually active teens said they themselves were not pressured into having sexual intercourse the first time,

but 65% DID say it just happened; they were, so to speak, "SWEPT AWAY".

They were so swept away that 1/3 said they had no time to use contraceptives.

C. Another 1/4 said they lacked knowledge or access or they were too fearful or embarassed to use them. They said things like:

-I can't get them.
-I don't know enough.
-I don't know where to get them.
-I can't afford to buy them.
-I'm afraid my parents will find out.
-I think they're dangerous
-I'm afraid of side effects
-I'd be embarassed.

So what we see is that the teens who are least prepared to deal with an unwanted, unintended pregnancy are saying they are being swept away by sex. They say they don't use contraceptives either because they're not prepared or because they don't know enough about contraceptives and where to get them.

IV. BUT WHAT DO TEENS KNOW ABOUT SEX AND CONTRACEPTIVES?

A. In terms of myths vs. facts there were some positive results in the study.

1. 71% know that, "A girl can become pregnant even if she douches with Coca-Cola after intercourse."

2. 78% know that "A girl can become pregnant the first time she has intercourse."

3. 79% know that "A girl can get pregnant in positions other than just lying flat on her back during intercourse."

HOWEVER, we still have a long way to go in educating our teens.

4. 17% still believe withdrawal works well in preventing pregnancy.

5. 29% either don't know or think the pill is ineffective at pregnancy prevention.

6. 39% think the condom is ineffective or they don't know if it is effective.

7. 41% believe that, "A girl has to have an orgasm to become pregnant."

8. 59% don't know or aren't sure when during the menstrual cycle a girl is most likely to become pregnant.

9. 65% aren't sure or believe that a girl cannot become pregnant as long as her male partner's penis does not enter her vagina.

10. 76% aren't sure or believe that a girl cannot become pregnant if she has intercourse during her menstrual period.

From these misconceptions and myths it is clear that teens need comprehensive sexuality education so they can make informed decisions about their own sexuality. And those who answer wrong most often need to be targeted to receive even more education.

V. WHO ARE THEY?

A. Teens with no sexuality education need to be a major focus of our attention. See Graph 7.

1. 34% of those with no sexuality education scored low on knowledge.
2. Only 8% of those with comprehensive sexuality education scored low on knowledge.

B. Boys need our help. (See Graph 8) 30% of boys scored low while only 18% of girls scored low on knowledge.

C. Teens from low- and middle-income families need our help, too. See Graph 9.

1. 31% of teens from low-income families scored low on knowledge.
2. 23% of teens from middle-income families scored low on knowledge.
3. 19% of teens from high-income families scored low on knowledge.

(Little difference by race was seen. In fact more blacks scored high on knowledge than did whites or Hispanics.)

D. Teens with low grades need special attention. See Graph 10.

1. 29% of C - F scored low on knowledge.
2. 22% of B - B- scored low on knowledge.
3. 20% of A - B+ scored low on knowledge.

VI. In order to know how to provide sexuality education we have to know WHERE THEY ARE GETTING THEIR INFORMATION NOW.

SLIDE 13

A. Parents are the primary source for information followed by friends, a course or teacher in school and then television.

Pregnancy Information	Birth Control Information	
40%	29%	Parents
20%	14%	Friends
19%	19%	Course
6%	8%	TV

B. Even though 68% of teens have talked to their parents about sex or birth control, 50% said they would be nervous or afraid to bring up the subject of sex or birth control with their parents. The overlap indicates that some teens will talk to their parents even if they, the teens, are nervous.

VII. WHO DOES NOT TALK WITH THEIR PARENTS?

This is important because there is a relationship between knowledge level and talking to parents about sexuality. See Graph 11.

A. 40 percent of teenagers who score low on knowledge, never talk to their parents about sex compared to 31% and 23% for those with medium and high levels of knowledge (respectively).

B. Boys (41 percent) are far more likely than girls (20 percent) to never talk to their parents. See Graph 12.

C. There were surprisingly few differences, by age, BUT Hispanic teens (45 percent) are far more likely to never talk to their parents compared to black or white teens (29 percent for each). See Graph 13.

D. There were few differences by income, but children of parents with low educational levels (43 percent) were more likely to never talk to their parents about sexuality or contraceptives than were those with high school educations (30 percent) or with some college (26 percent) or with college degrees (23%). See Graph 14.

However, since 68% of teens talk to their parents about sexuality or birth control, parents represent an important source of information for many teens. We need to further educate parents so they can provide even better, more thorough information. In this endeavor, I would like to encourage the use of Planned Parenthood's book and brochure, How to Talk with Your Child About Sexuality. We have sold over 40,000 copies of the book and it is going into a second edition with a new chapter on AIDS. However, according to this poll, if a particular program is targeting boys and/or Hispanics, using parents may not be the most effective means for increasing the teens' knowledge level.

VIII. Teenagers are also influenced by societal views through the media and in particular by television. (See Figure 2).

WHO IS BEING INFLUENCED BY TV AND HOW?

A. Teenagers say that TV is the 4th most important source of information.

B. 45% think TV gives realistic views of sexually transmitted diseases (Only 28% of adults agree.)

C. 41% think TV gives realistic views of pregnancy and the consequences of sex. (Only 24% of adults agree.)

D. 28% think TV gives realistic views of family planning. (Only 17% of adults agree.)

E. 34% think TV gives realistic views of people making love (Only 18% of adults agree.)

F. The most distressing fact is that older teens, who presumably have the greatest knowledge and who are more likely to have sexual intercourse, are the ones most likely to think TV is realistic.

G. But it is encouraging to know that the more comprehensive their sexuality education course, the LESS likely they are to think TV portrayals are realistic. For this reason and because parents cannot always answer all their children's questions, it is important to know:

IX. HOW MUCH INFLUENCE THE SCHOOLS ARE HAVING AND ON WHOM?

A. Schools are the 3rd most important source of information. 59% of teens have had a formal course in sexuality education.

B. YET 40% of teens have had NO sexuality education in school.

C. ONLY 35% of teens have had comprehensive sexuality education.

D. Younger teens and boys are less likely to have had sexuality education in school.

E. Blacks are least likely to have had sexuality education in school. See Graph 15.

F. Regionally, teens in the South (53 percent) are the most likely to never have had sexuality education in school, followed by those in the Mid-West (45 percent), and then the East (35 percent). Teens in the West are the most likely to have had sexuality education. See Graph 16.

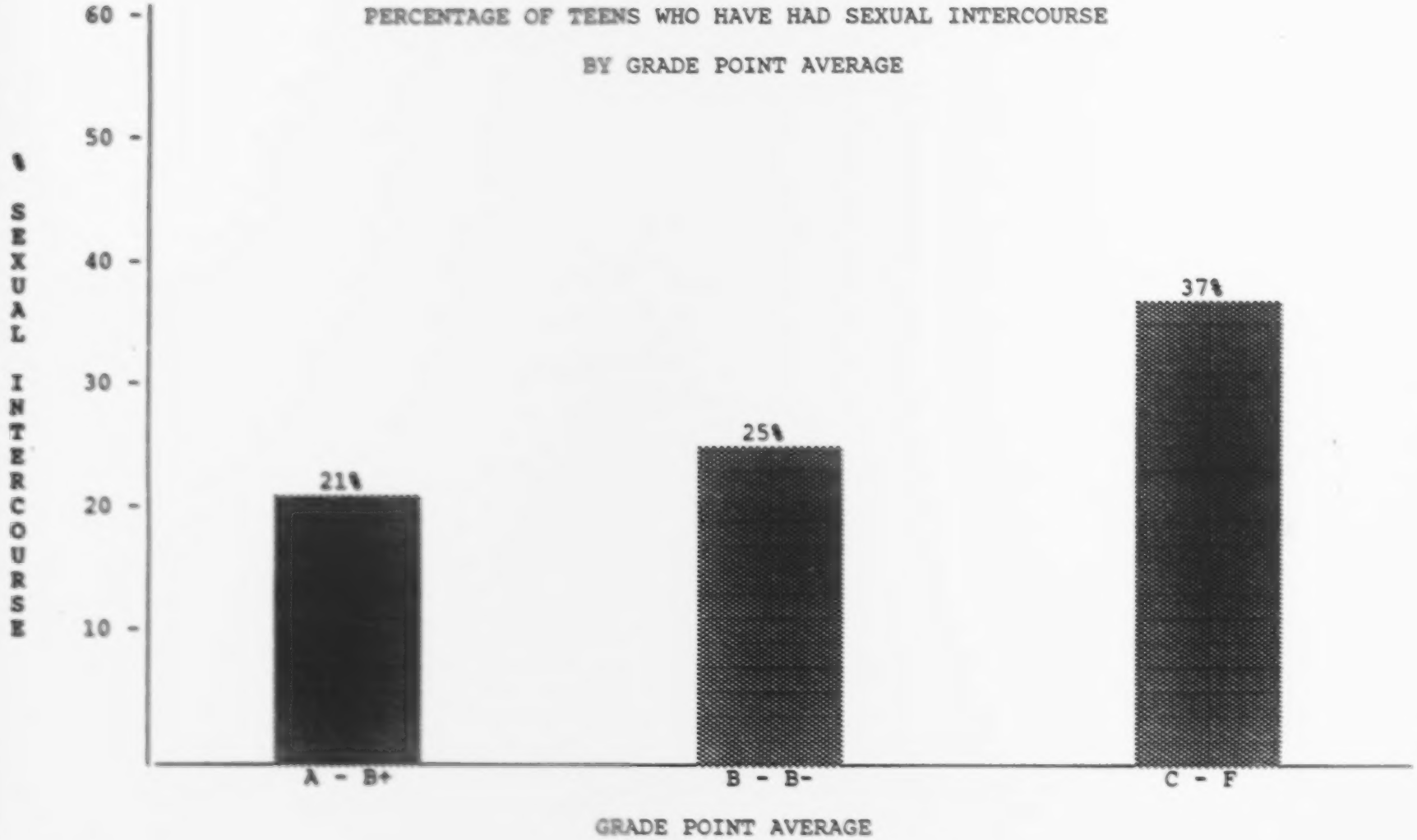
Therefore, the need for sexuality education in schools is wide-spread but particular emphasis needs to be placed on providing sexuality education in the schools for younger teens, boys, blacks and teens in the South.

In summary, this poll suggests three ways for overcoming barriers to information and services for teens. First, teenagers must be given accurate information from their parents and their schools about sexuality and contraceptives. We need to expand educational programs for parents to make them better sexuality educators of their own children. We must all work together to make comprehensive sexuality education available in all school districts. Second, we must break down society's sexual myths portrayed in the media so that teenagers understand that sexual involvement requires a great deal of responsibility and forethought.

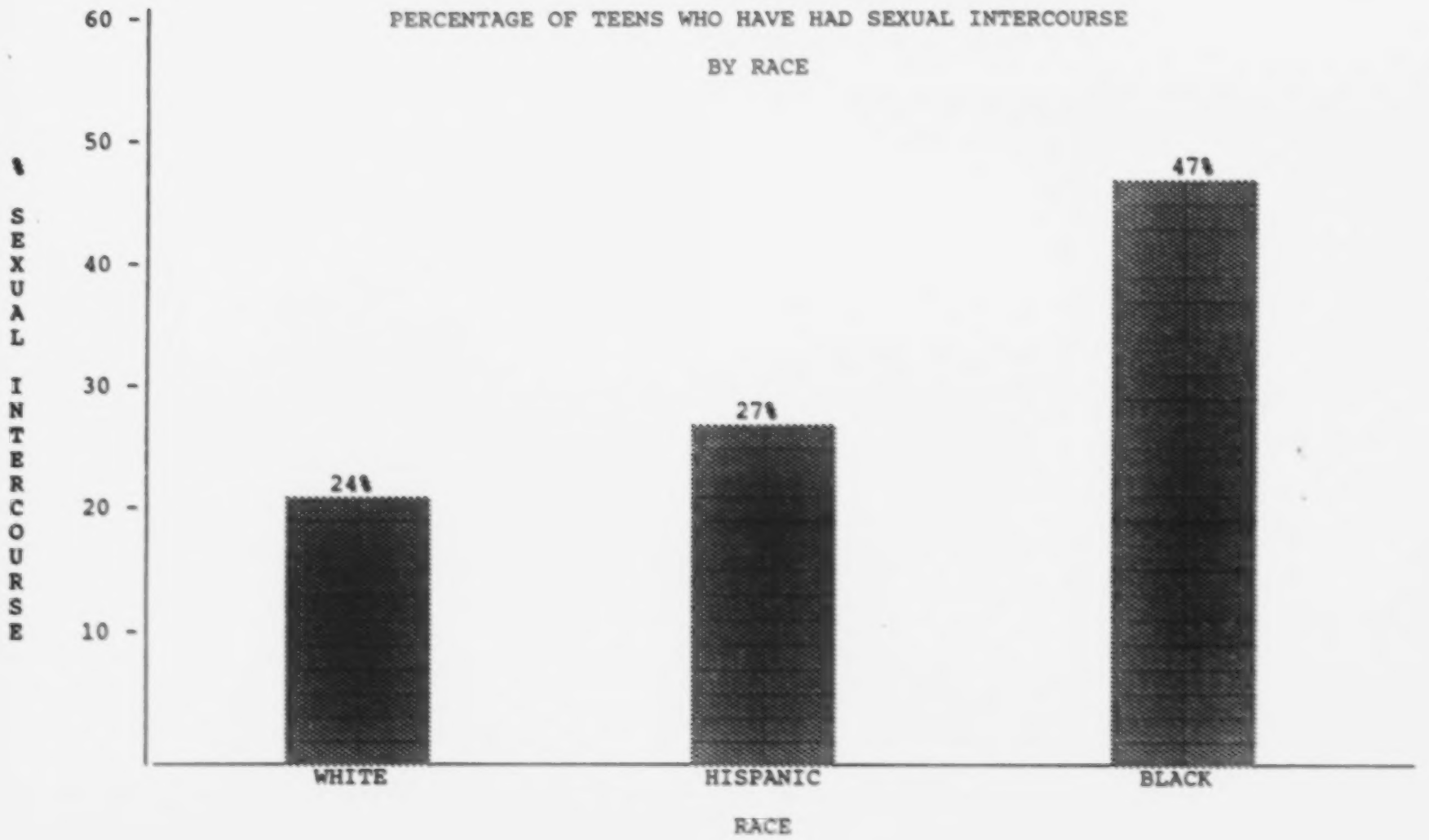
But finally, information is NOT enough. We must keep a balanced perspective...sexuality is more than a lecture or a public service announcement on Sexually Transmitted Diseases. Teenagers must be motivated not to become pregnant. They must be offered educational and career opportunities that motivate them to use the information they have in order to prevent pregnancies. This requires that we strengthen our coalitions between service providing organizations which have the capacity to provide teenagers with information and access to contraceptive related reproductive health care and organizations such as churches, schools, youth serving agencies and parent groups, which can help to provide motivational tools so that teenagers can be encouraged to plan their futures and avoid the pitfalls of early pregnancy. Towards this endeavor, we at Planned Parenthood look forward to joining with you as agents of social changes in communities all across the country. Together, we <u>can</u> do something about this national tragedy.

Thank You.

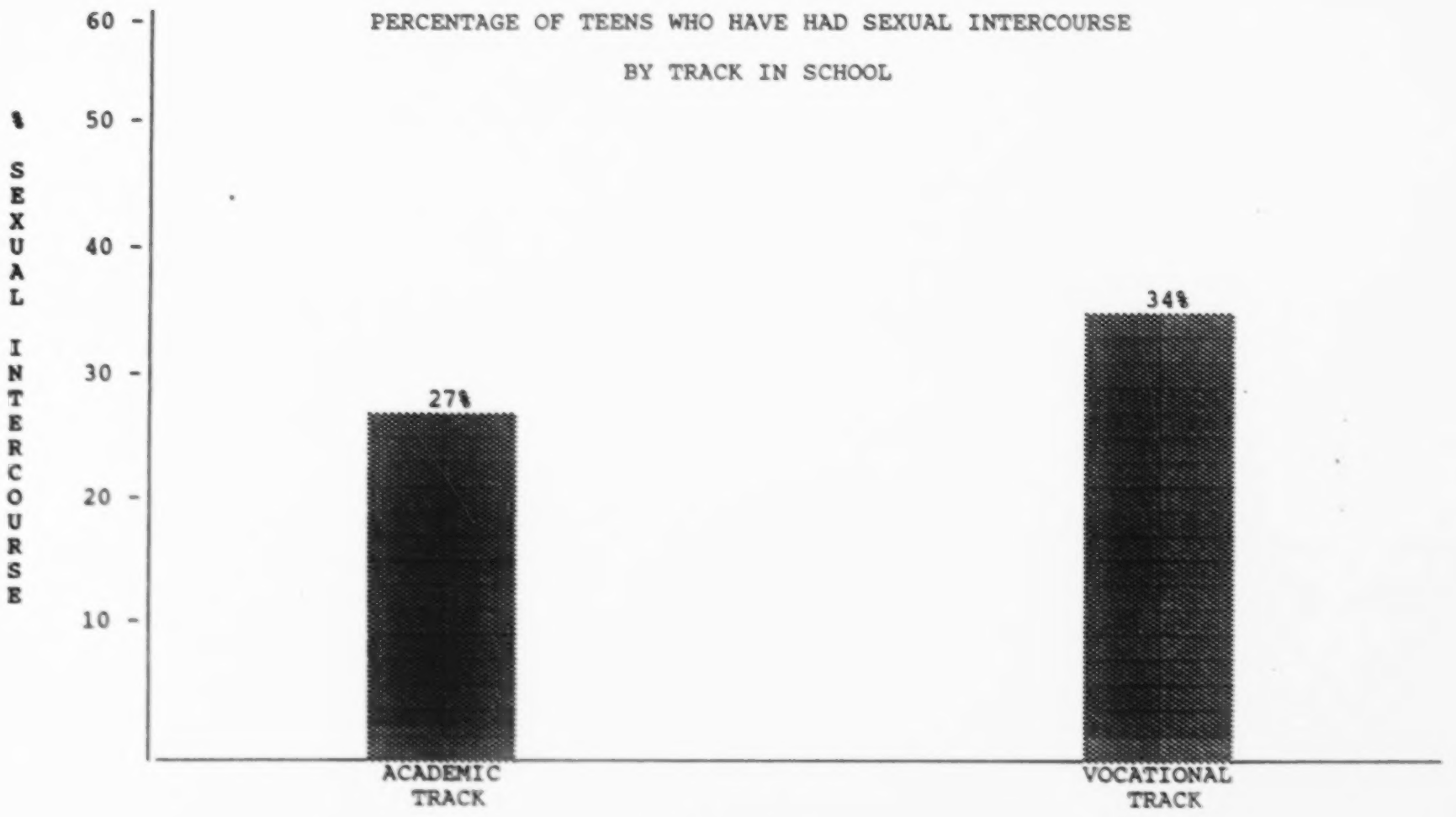
GRAPH 1


PERCENTAGE OF TEENS WHO HAVE HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE
BY GRADE POINT AVERAGE
% SEXUAL INTERCOURSE
60
50
40
30
20
10
21%
25%
37%
A - B+
B - B-
C - F
GRADE POINT AVERAGE

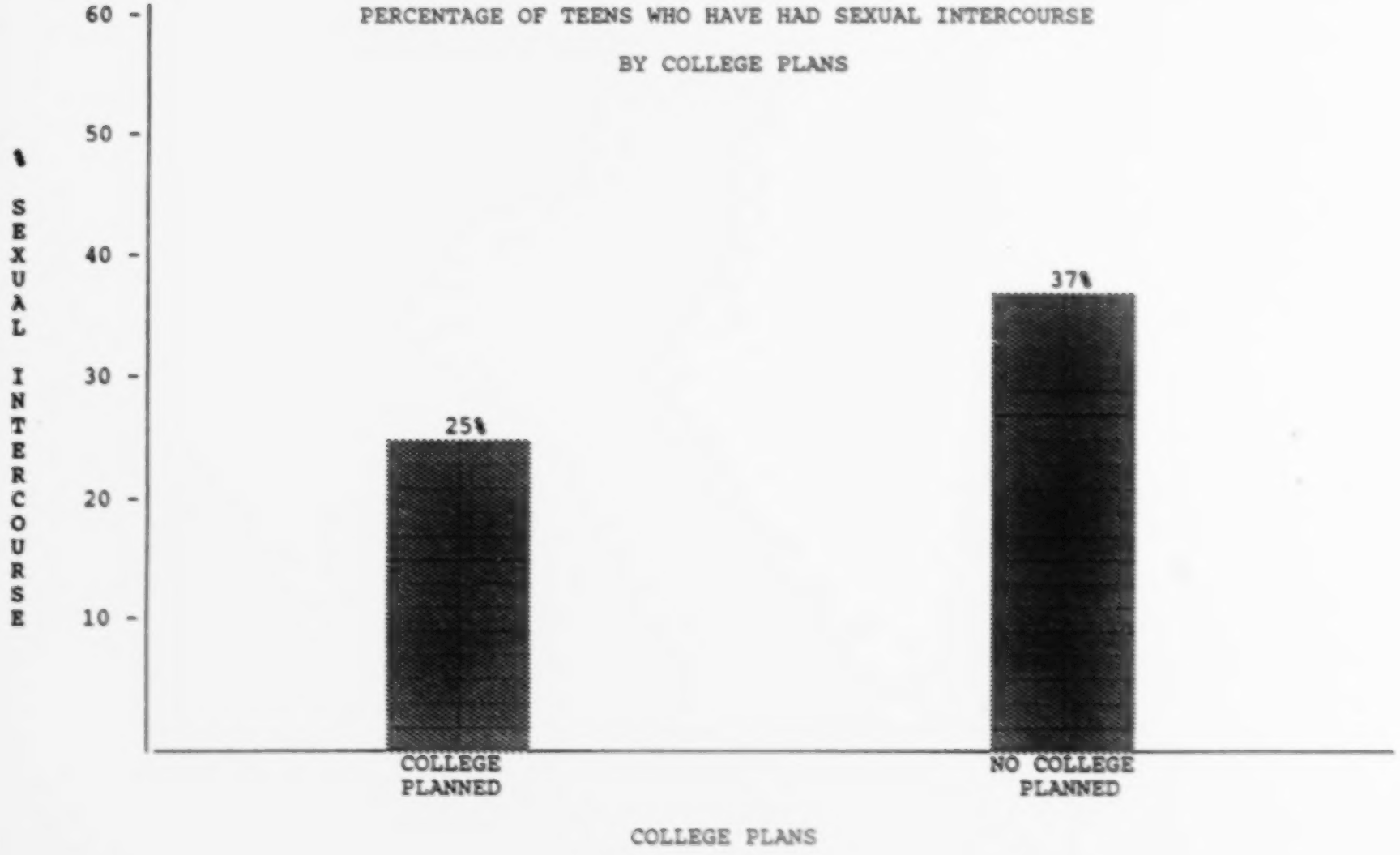
GRAPH 2


PERCENTAGE OF TEENS WHO HAVE HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE
BY RACE
% SEXUAL INTERCOURSE
60
50
40
30
20
10
24%
27%
47%
WHITE
HISPANIC
BLACK
RACE

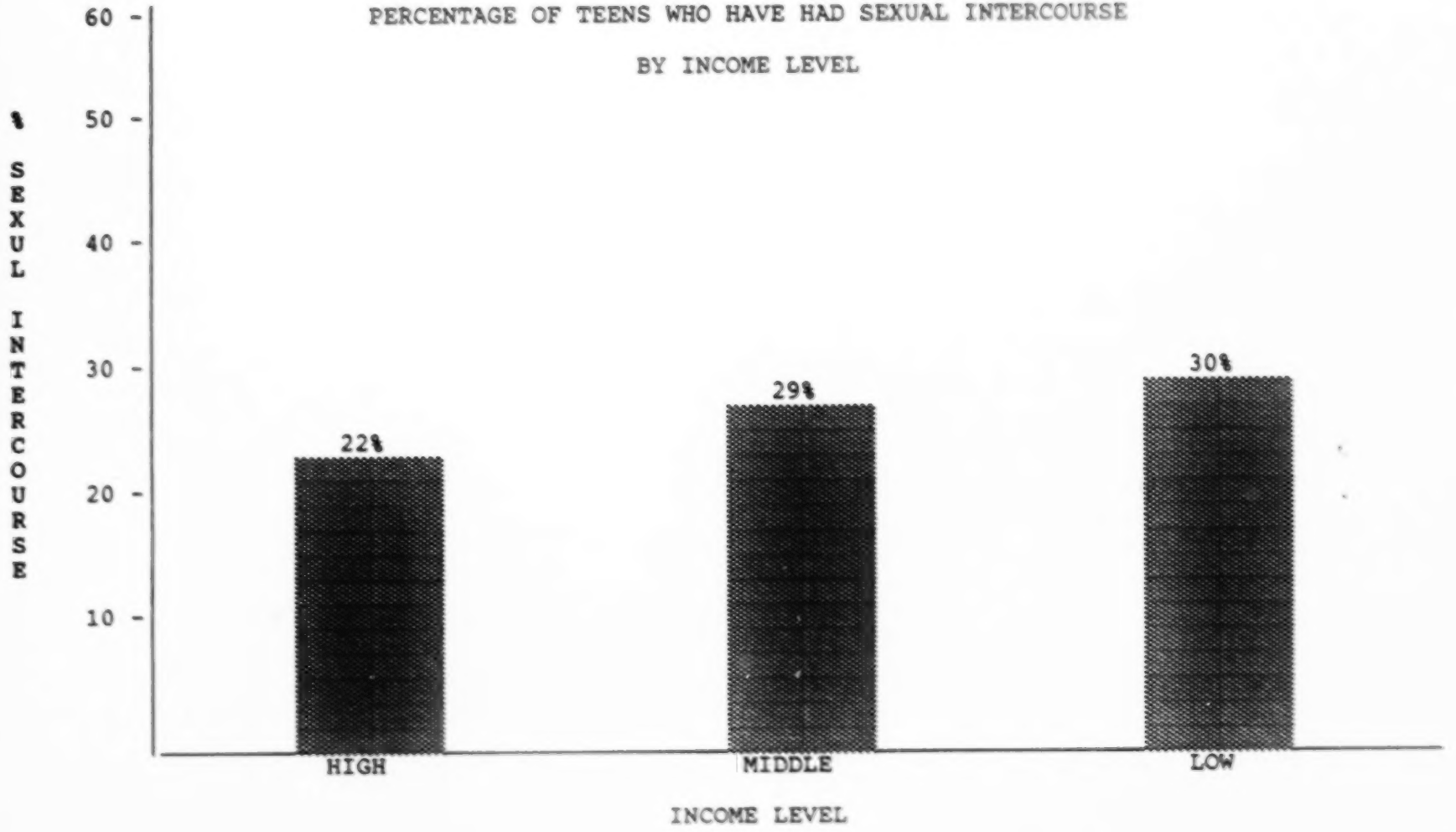
GRAPH 3


PERCENTAGE OF TEENS WHO HAVE HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE
BY TRACK IN SCHOOL
% SEXUAL INTERCOURSE
60
50
40
30
20
10
27%
34%
ACADEMIC TRACK
VOCATIONAL TRACK
TRACK IN SCHOOL

GRAPH 4


PERCENTAGE OF TEENS WHO HAVE HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE
BY COLLEGE PLANS
% SEXUAL INTERCOURSE
60
50
40
30
20
10
25%
37%
COLLEGE PLANNED
NO COLLEGE PLANNED
COLLEGE PLANS

GRAPH 5


PERCENTAGE OF TEENS WHO HAVE HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE
BY INCOME LEVEL
% SEXUL INTERCOURSE
60
50
40
30
20
10
22%
29%
30%
HIGH
MIDDLE
LOW
INCOME LEVEL

GRAPH 6

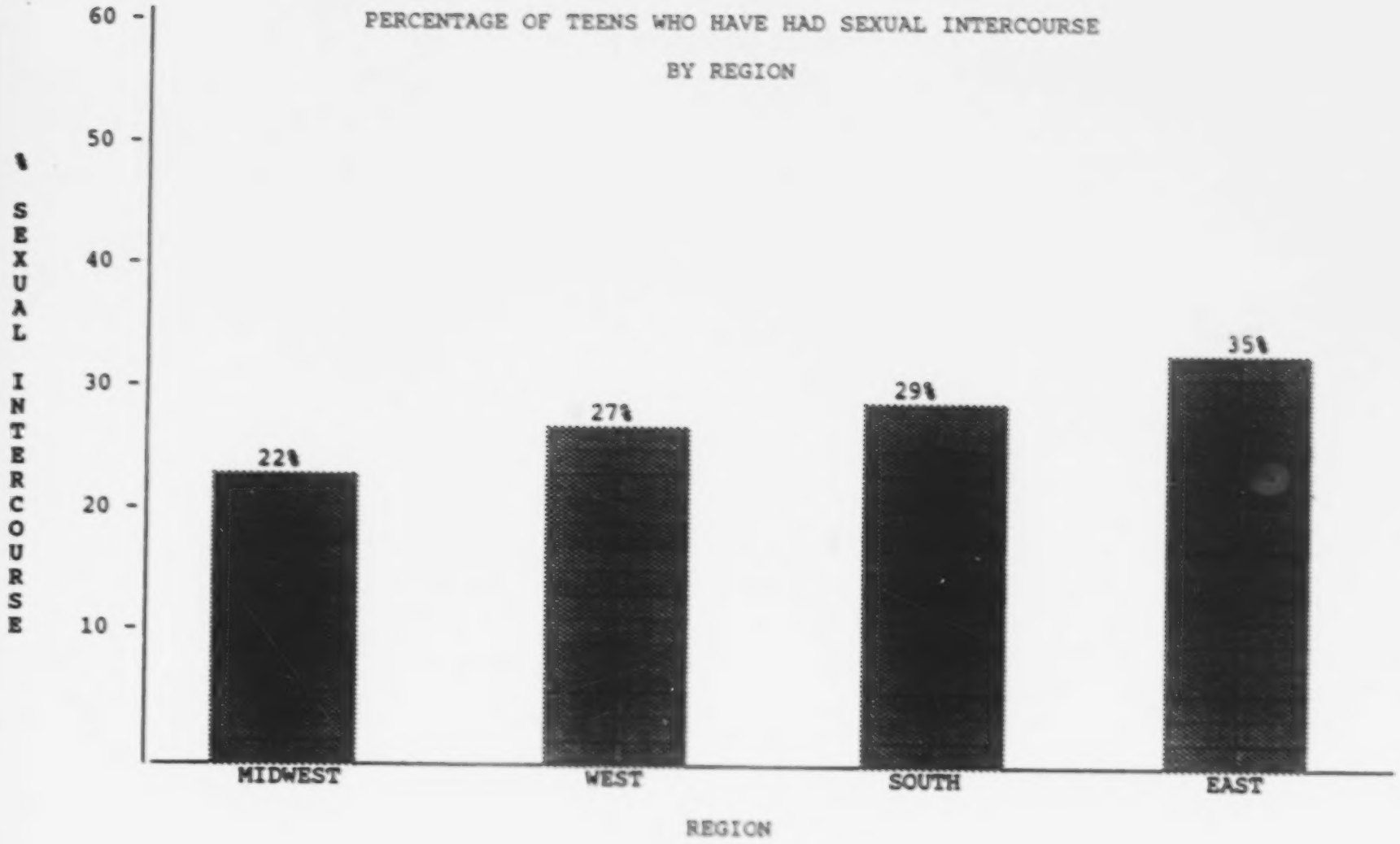
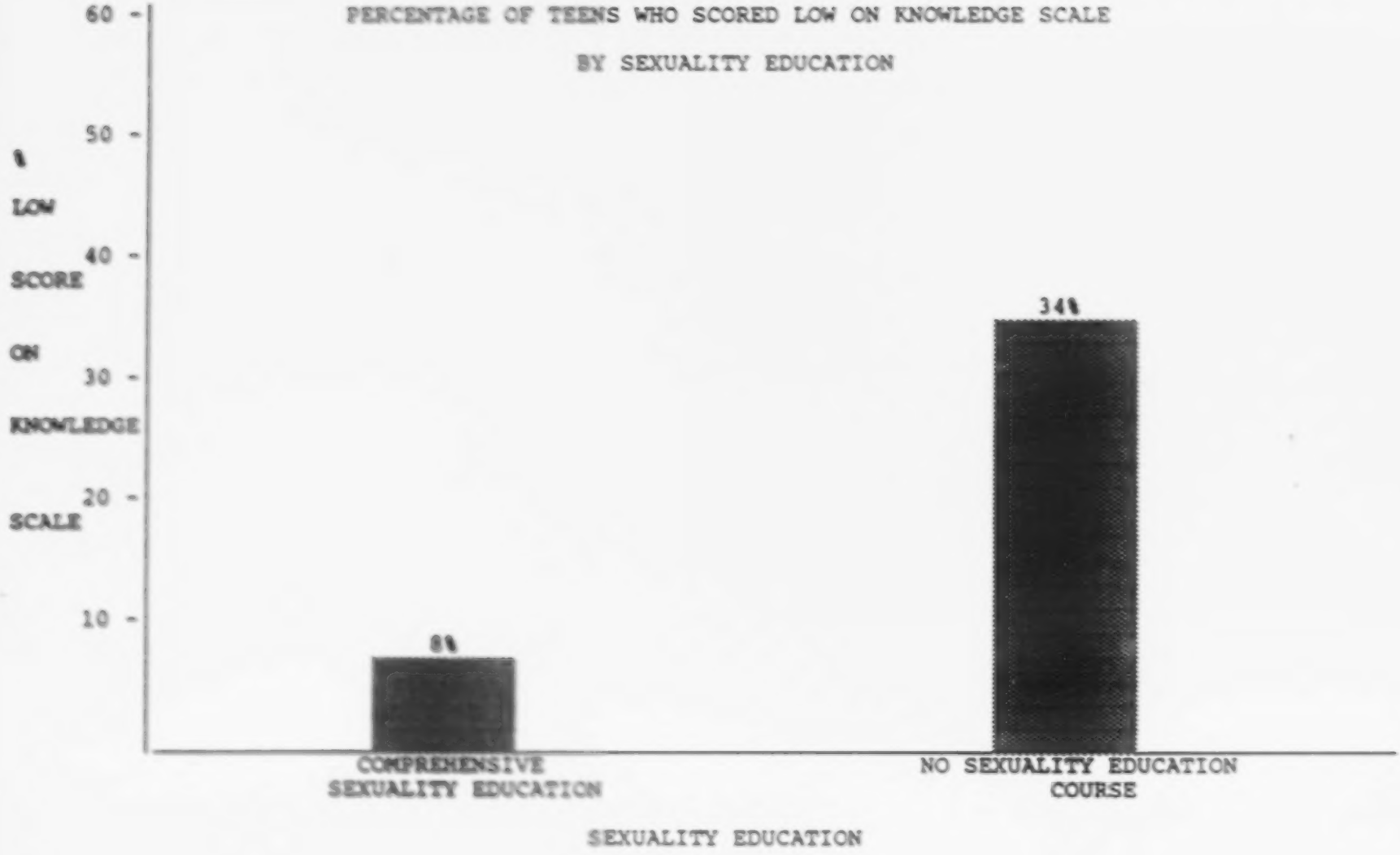

PERCENTAGE OF TEENS WHO HAVE HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE
BY REGION
% SEXUAL INTERCOURSE
60
50
40
30
20
10
22%
27%
29%
35%
MIDWEST
WEST
SOUTH
EAST
REGION

FIGURE 1

Teenagers say social pressure is the main reason for early sexual intercourse.

Courtesy of Planned Parenthood® Federation of America

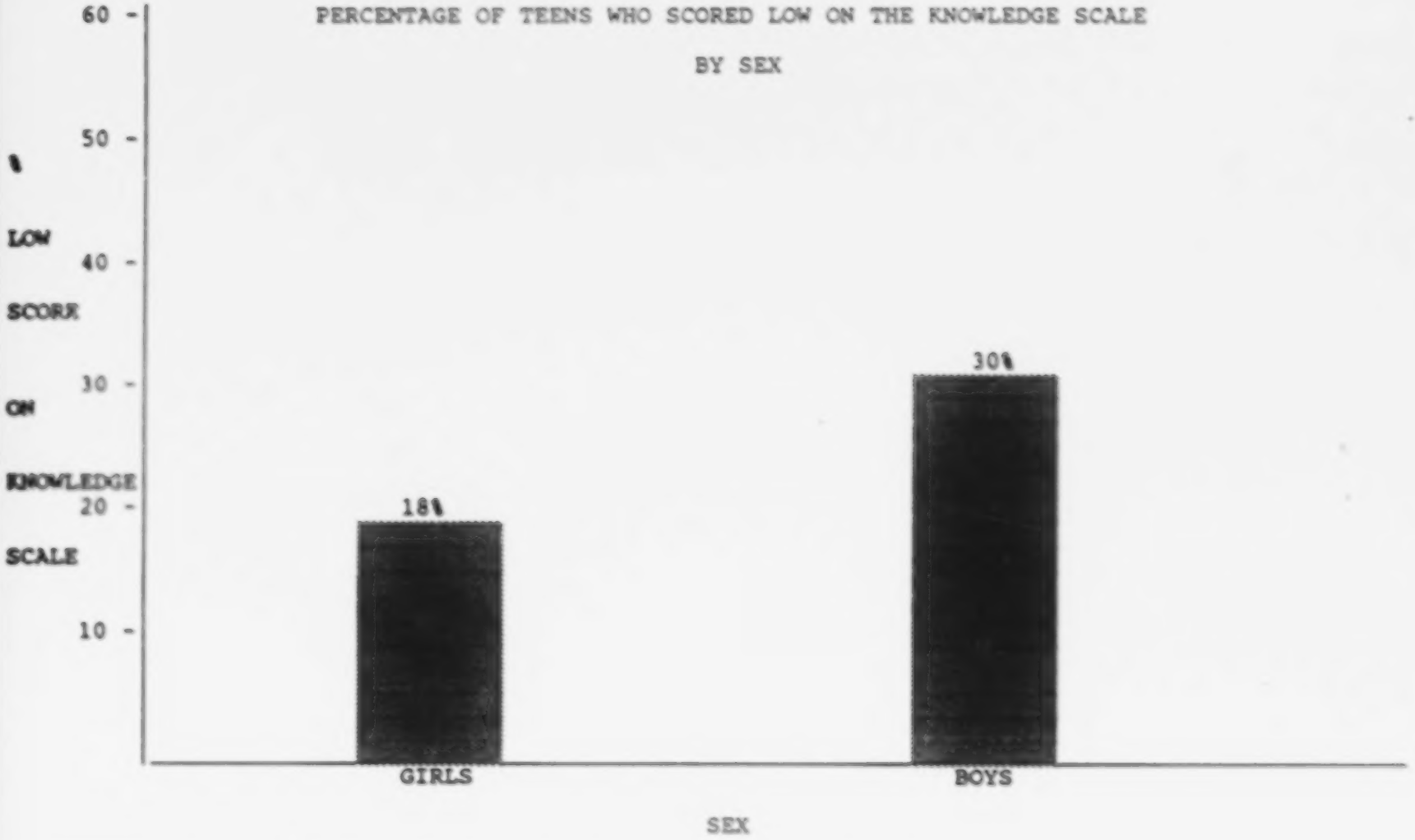
GRAPH 7


PERCENTAGE OF TEENS WHO SCORED LOW ON KNOWLEDGE SCALE
BY SEXUALITY EDUCATION
60 -
50 -
40 -
30 -
20 -
10 -
% LOW SCORE ON KNOWLEDGE SCALE
8%
34%
COMPREMENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION
NO SEXUALITY EDUCATION COURSE
SEXUALITY EDUCATION

GRAPH 8

PERCENTAGE OF TEENS WHO SCORED LOW ON THE KNOWLEDGE SCALE

BY SEX



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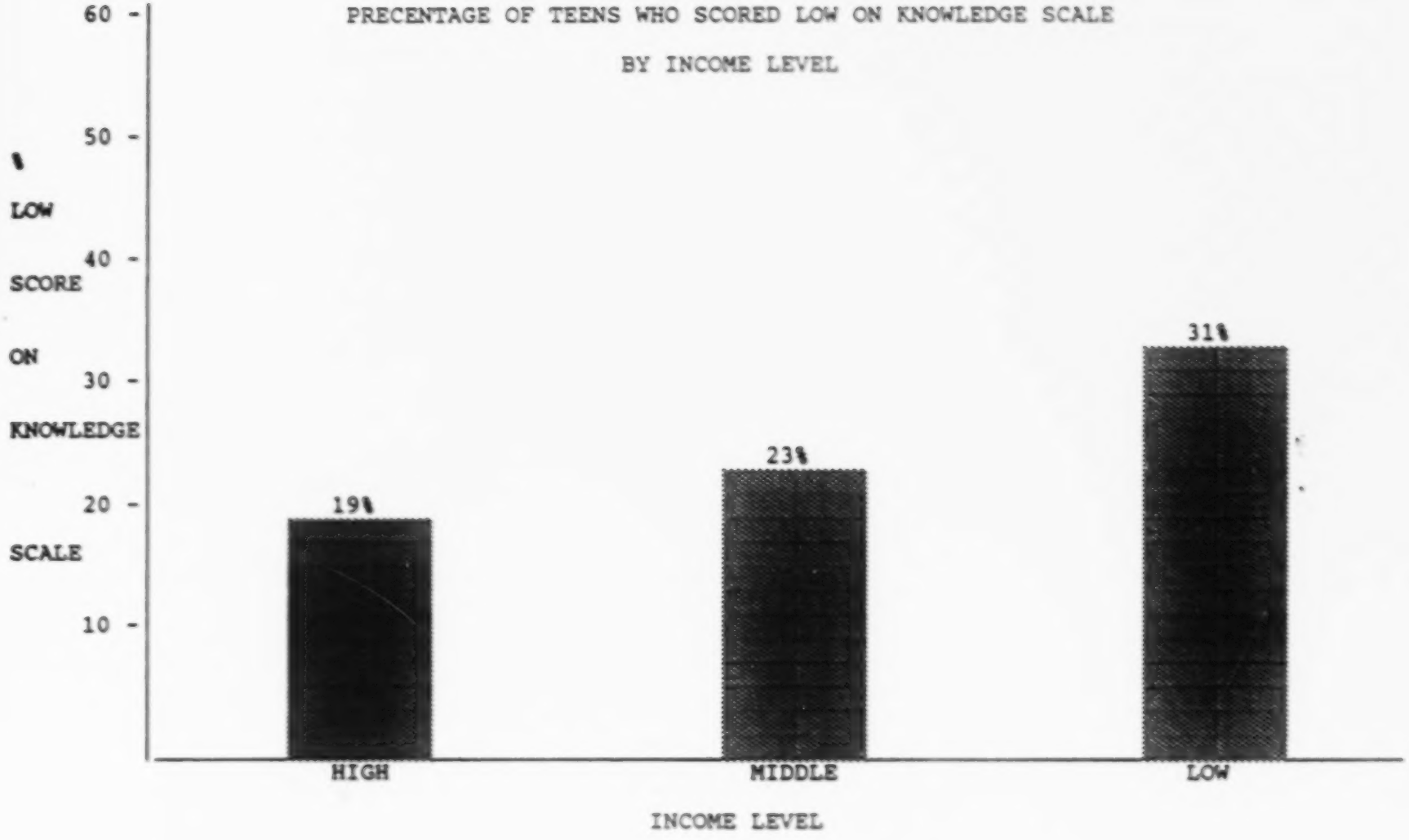
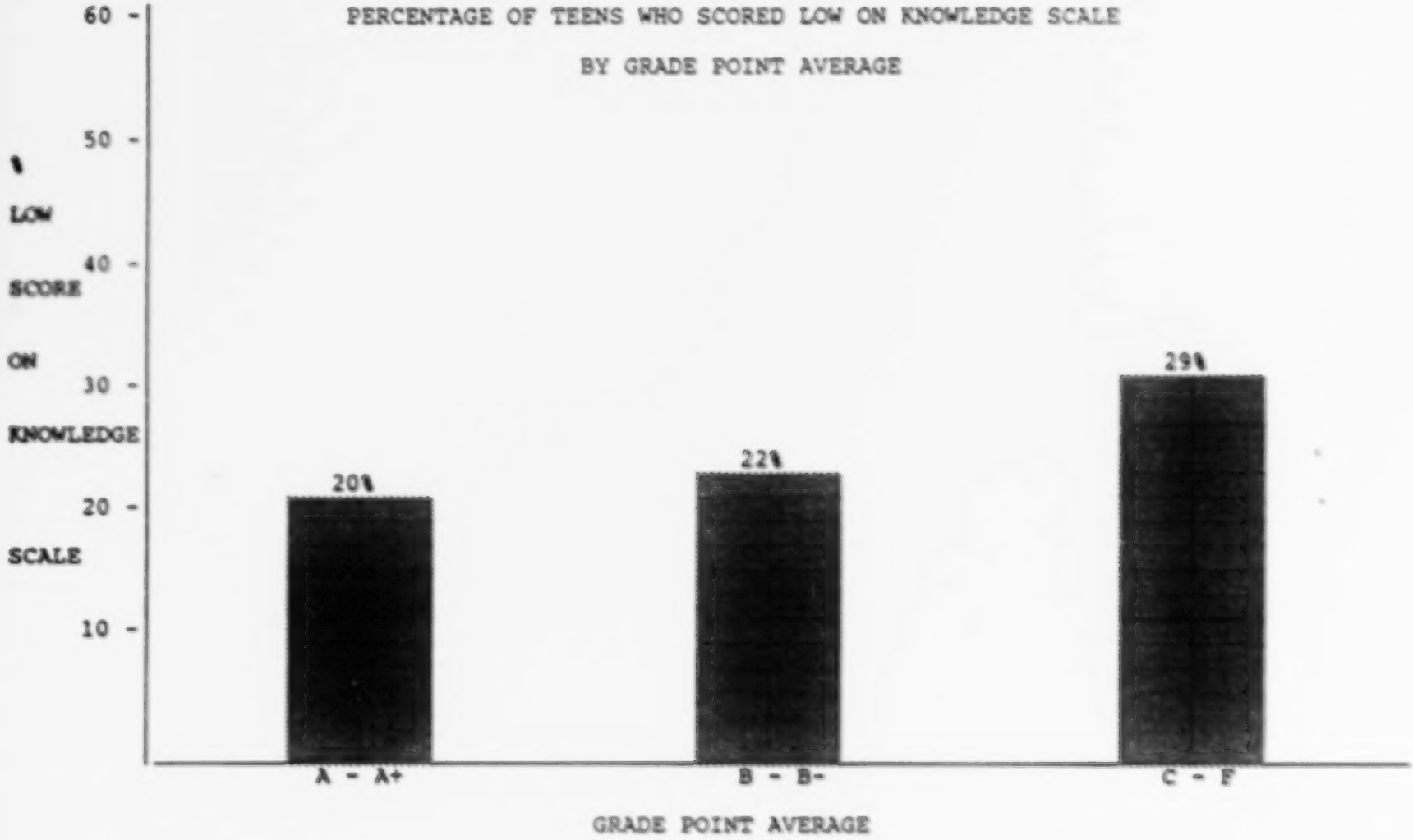
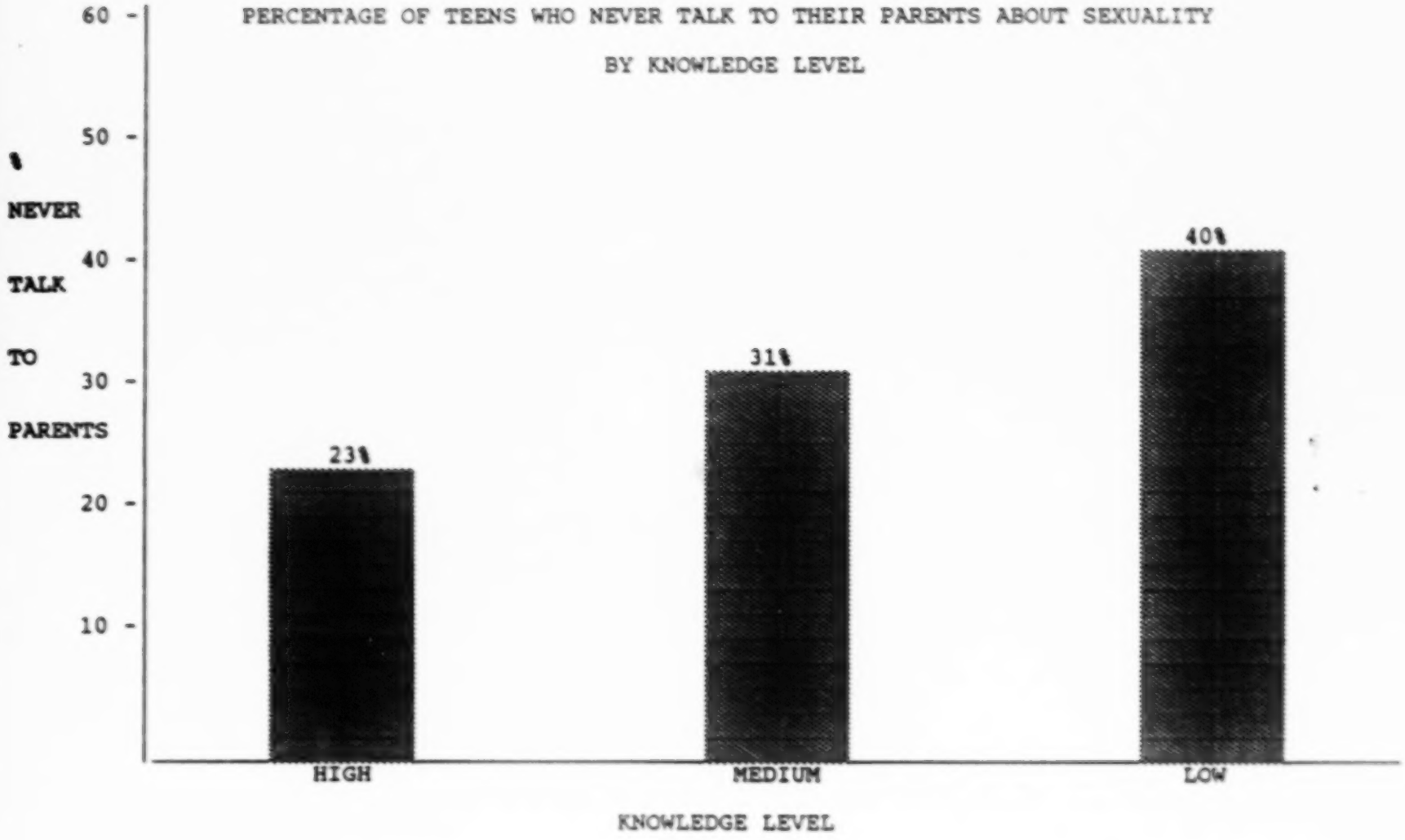

PRECENTAGE OF TEENS WHO SCORED LOW ON KNOWLEDGE SCALE
BY INCOME LEVEL
60 -
50 -
40 -
30 -
20 -
10 -
%
LOW
SCORE
ON
KNOWLEDGE
SCALE
19%
23%
31%
HIGH
MIDDLE
LOW
INCOME LEVEL

GRAPH 10


PERCENTAGE OF TEENS WHO SCORED LOW ON KNOWLEDGE SCALE
BY GRADE POINT AVERAGE
60 -
50 -
40 -
30 -
20 -
10 -
% LOW SCORE ON KNOWLEDGE SCALE
20%
22%
29%
A - A+
B - B-
C - F
GRADE POINT AVERAGE

GRAPH 11


PERCENTAGE OF TEENS WHO NEVER TALK TO THEIR PARENTS ABOUT SEXUALITY
BY KNOWLEDGE LEVEL
60
50
40
30
20
10
%
NEVER
TALK
TO
PARENTS
23%
31%
40%
HIGH
MEDIUM
LOW
KNOWLEDGE LEVEL